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TWO BORROWINGS OF WORDSWORTH

William Wordsworth is not usually set down as one of that company, including Shakspeare and other less illustrious ones, who, to use Montaigne's phrase, take their own where they find it. Such poetic borrowings and hints as he made use of he was generally careful to acknowledge in his notes. We find him telling of suggestions from the writings of Shakspeare, Milton, Scott, Lady Winchilsea, and even such comparatively little known authors as Sir John Beaumont, brother of the dramatist, and Rev. Joseph Simpson. There are two instances of apparent indebtedness, however, which neither he nor his editors, so far as I have been able to discover, have ever pointed out.

The first is the opening lines of the sonnet beginning

With how sad steps, O moon, thou climb'st the sky,
"How silently, and with how wan a face!"

They are the exact words of the first two lines of Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella*, Sonnet XXI, except that Sidney uses the plural "skies." Wordsworth was probably aware that he was quoting, as is shown by his putting the second line in quotation-marks, while the first, which varies slightly from Sidney, is not so marked. That his thoughts were on Sidney at the time is indicated by his statement in the notes that a line and a half in the sonnet entitled "November, 1806," written in the same year, were suggested by "words in Lord Brooke's Life of Sir P. Sidney."

Beyond the opening lines the sonnets show no similarity, either in thought or phrasing. Just why Wordsworth did not see fit to ascribe them to their proper source is not quite clear. Probably he considered Sidney's sonnet too well known to require this acknowledgment, and took the first two lines as a suitable point of departure for his own verse.

At the beginning of the noble *Ode to Duty*, the poet apostrophizes duty as

Stern daughter of the voice of God!

This expression, which has occasioned some discussion, I believe finds its inspiration also in the writings of one of his predecessors. One editor¹ suggests that by "the voice of God," Wordsworth "probably means conscience." This explanation seems most in accord with the thought of the poem; and the idea is borne out by a passage in *Paradise Lost*, ix, 651-53. Eve, in explaining the injunction not to touch the fruit of the tree, says to the serpent:

¹ Gayley, *English Poetry: Its Principles and Progress*, p. 523.

But of this tree we may not taste nor touch;
God so commanded, and left that command
Sole daughter of his voice.

Wordsworth's reverence for Milton and familiarity with his works are well known. It is possible that he may not have recalled at the time this expression of Eve's, in giving duty, awakened by conscience, as the reason for her refusal to partake of the forbidden fruit. But the similarity is so apparent that it is difficult to escape the conclusion that, whether he was conscious of it or not, this speech of Eve suggested to the poet the first line of his great ode.

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A PARALLEL IN LITERARY BIOGRAPHY

John Keats and Joseph Rodman Drake naturally do not suggest each other; one is a noted English poet, the other a somewhat forgotten writer of American verse. A close examination, however, of the lives of these two men reveals a similarity in several details which furnishes a striking literary coincidence.

Keats was born in 1795 and died in 1821. Drake was born in 1795 and died in 1820. Both poets, in their early years, were familiar with poverty. Both of them were poets from childhood. Keats was a licensed surgeon before he engaged in poetical composition as his professional work. Drake graduated in medicine before he wrote any of his best-known pieces, including *The American Flag*. Keats contracted consumption and went to Italy in search of health. Drake developed the same disease and visited Louisiana in the hope of driving off what his friend Halleck called "consumption's ghastly form." Both men failed in the fight for life.

Although there is nothing in the works of these two poets, aside from the romantic spirit, to constitute a literary parallel, either by accident or influence, the biographical facts nevertheless record two pathetic life-histories being worked out at almost exactly the same time on opposite sides of the Atlantic. Just as we speculate about the work Keats might have done in later life, we may wonder what Drake's full contribution to American poetry would have been had he not gone the way of Adonais himself.

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